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The Damascus Conference

The Arab League Palestine Committee met according to schedule on the 4th March in Damascus under the chairmanship of Jamil Barakat (owing to 'Assad's absence). It was attended by Riyad Solh, Isma'il Safwat, Taha Hashim and Fawzi Qawuqji. The Mufti and Jamal Husseini were also to attend (ANA, 5.3.), but the former did not arrive in time to participate in the opening meeting and therefore instructed Mu'in al-Kidhi to replace him. Another absentee was 'Abdul-qadir al-Jundi the recently appointed T.J. representative on the League's Military Committee, who excused himself with urgent affairs in 'Aman. Another meeting was held on the same day, presided over by President Juwayli. During the meeting constant telephone contact was maintained between Damascus and the other Arab capitals (Ahran, 7.3.). It would be interesting to know whether Brig. Clayton attended the meetings. He had left Damascus on the 2nd March for a 2-days' trip to Aleppo, and was to be back on the 4th (ANA, 2.3.). The other reported emissary of the British, Husein 'Alami, had already left Damascus for Baghdad on the 3rd, whence he is to proceed to Riyadh (Palestin, 5.3.).

The Conference was devoted to problems of sending reinforcements to Palestine, extending medical assistance to the wounded (erection of mobile hospitals on the frontiers, Palestin, 4.3.) and the coordination of inter-Arab political and military activities in connection with Palestine. The attitude to be adopted regarding the arrival of the UN Implementation Commission's Advance Party was also discussed (ibid.). According to 'Nahar' (6.3.) the Committee examined also a new plan received by cable from New York, providing for a "positive" solution of the Pal. problem along the lines of the Federal State scheme which it will be recalled, was submitted by Camille Sham'un to the UN Assembly on the eve of the vote on Partition.

Although the Conference was supposed to be that of the League's Political (Palestine) Committee (Ahran, 8.3.), the composition of its participants underlines the military nature of the discussions; this accounts, in fact, for the decision to send at once Fawzi Qawuqji to Palestine for the purpose of "strengthening the Arab position in view of the momentous changes in the UN attitude towards the Partition plan" (ibid.). As is already common knowledge, Fawzi left the following day for Palestine, at the head of an invasion force (AP, 4.3.) and accompanied by a group of liaison officers headed by the Druse 'Ali 'Nasr-oddin, a wartime Nazi collaborator and former Secretary of the pro-Nazi "Syrian Popular Party", who was now given the task to compose a message to the Palestinian Arabs announcing that Fawzi had arrived to lead the attack on the Zionist dream (Ahran, 8.3.). The fact that this grave decision was taken and carried out in the absence of the Mufti, sheds peculiar light on existing relations between him and the League. Another sign that the Arabs mean (or pretend to mean) action, is the withdrawal of Isma'il Safwat from the Military Committee in order to devote himself wholly to the leadership of the "Liberation" forces; General Sulaiman ar-Radd has been appointed to replace him as Iraqi representative on the Committee (Ahran, 7.3.).

According to NEBS (8.3.), the Damascus Conference is to be followed in a few days by another one of the "Arab League States", discussing joint measures regarding Palestine after the British withdrawal. All Arab Defence Ministers will attend. It is not quite clear whether this conference is identical with that of the Chiefs of Staff of the Arab armies (or Defence Ministers, according to AFP, 6.3.) reported by the same source to be to open at the same time in Baghdad, to discuss the Syrian proposal for a "Federal State" (Ahran, 8.3.).

ENCLOSURE